MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMISSION
OF FINE ARTS
16 September 1964

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The Commission met, pursuant to notice, at 9:30 a.m., with William Walton, Chairman, presiding.

Present were: Members: William Walton
Gordon Bunshaft
Burnham Kelly
Theodore Roszak
Aline Saarinen
Hideo Sasaki
John Carl Warnecke

Staff: L.R. Wilson, Secretary
C.H. Atherton, Asst. Sec'y
C.L. Martin, Counsel
Myra Younker, Editor
Leone M. Vialpando, Reporter

I. SUBMISSIONS-REVIEWS-INTERVIEWS

1. General Services Administration, Public Buildings Service

a. National Air and Space Museum, Between 4th and 7th Streets, Independence Avenue and Jefferson Drive

Mr. J. Rowland Snyder, Director, Design Division, and Mr. James Jones, Coordinator, General Services Administration, Public Buildings Service, and Mr. Gyo Obata, architect for the project, met with the Commission to discuss further developments of the design for the National Air and Space Museum. Prints of the tentative drawings and a scale model of the multilevel building were submitted for review.

Mr. Obata explained the revised design which had incorporated the recommendations made by the Commission during the June 24th meeting: the piers and other solid areas of the facade would be constructed of cast-in-place concrete with a granite aggregate. More study was planned to obtain the exact color and size of the aggregate. The model showed a row of windows continuing around the entire cornice, as previously suggested by the members.

Reviewing the plans, the Commission was impressed with the design, but the siting and scale of the building concerned the members. A change in grade and the 97 foot height restriction had required depressing the west end of the building which appeared sunken. The height of the building had reached the limitation. The members realized that a two-story garage below and the first floor grade and stairs would make it difficult to change the design to raise the building. To overcome this problem the members

suggested a formal sunken plaza be planned for the depressed area.

The monumental scale of the building was not realized strongly. The strength of the columns and piers needed to be emphasized. The members thought that any structural expression added to the soffit of the overhang might give contrast in scale.

The Commission requested that the architect's solution to these problems be submitted for review since working drawings had not been started.

The Chairman was authorized to send a letter stating the Commission's views. EXHIBIT A

b. Government Printing Office Field Plant, Navy Yard Annex

Mr. Snyder and Mr. Walter Meisen of the Regional Office, General Services Administration, Public Buildings Service, and Mr. Roy Owens of Clas and Riggs, architectural firm, met with the Commission to consider the design for the Government Printing Office Field Plant at the Navy Yard Annex. The problem of finding an appropriate site had been solved after several years of study.

Mr. Meisen explained that meetings were held with the National Capital Planning Commission to help plan this building into the overall objectives of the Planning Commission for the Navy Yard Annex (Weapons Plant). A study was made of the building and the immediately surrounding buildings which would remain as would a small park in front of the old Sewage Treatment Plant.

The project was planned into two phases since much of the time had been spent on selecting a site. Having a need for additional space, the Government Printing Office had asked that the work be phased due to limitation of not being able to design the entire building.

The major problem was the sewage, gas and water conduits in the area and would have to be relocated into a future street. Because of this, a one-story portion was planned for the first phase. A second story would be added at the time an addition would be built. The two-story portion would overlap the one-story building. The utilities would be relocated into a new roadway at this time.

During the review of the project on the previous day, members of the Commission had questioned the windowless wall of the building on the side overlooking the small park. As explained by Mr. Meisen, the park was not a pedestrian park but a visual area because utilities and access areas had to be maintained there. The graphic functions of the Printing Office, planned for the windowless section, did not require natural light. The

administrative office near the main entrance would have windows facing a small plaza.

The members were ~~grateful for~~ appreciated the detailed explanation of the placement of the building and of the problems involved in the project. The Commission approved the plans as presented.

The Chairman was authorized to send a letter stating the Commission's approval. EXHIBIT B

2. District of Columbia Government

a. Department of Licenses and Inspections

Watergate Development, Buildings Nos. 3 and 4, 2500 Virginia Avenue, N.W.

Mr. Valmarana, representing the architects of the Watergate Development, explained the studies made by the architects for the office building planned for Phase II of the project. The studies were based on the suggestion made by the Commission, during the June meeting, that the Virginia Avenue facade of the office building have the projection from the second floor through the fifth rather than from the ground level to the roofline. The Commission had approved the height, bulk, and structure of the office building and hotel provided the bulk of the office building had incorporated this suggestion into the design.

With a model and elevation drawings, Mr. Valmarana illustrated that the projection from the second through the fifth floor was not a very satisfactory solution. The architects for the project thought that a continuity would be retained if the projection from ground level to roofline were included in the design and that this projection would break the long horizontal line. After Mr. Valmarana's discussion and illustration of the problem, the members thought that the protrusion was unfortunate but, since it was necessary, carrying it through would result in a better design.

As explained by Mr. Valmarana, the bands indicating floor levels were slightly different in height since the office building had higher ceilings and windows. The difference was negligible and was absorbed gradually until the upper band would be the same height as the bands on other buildings.

The Commission approved the projection on the upper floors of the office building facing Virginia Avenue. The plans for the exterior connections from the balcony of the apartments around to the office building and samples of building materials are to be submitted for review during the October meeting.

The Chairman was authorized to report the Commission's approval to the Department of Licenses and Inspections.

b. Department of Highways and Traffic

Ninth Street Expressway Under the Mall - Proposed Design

Mr. G. I. Sawyer, Deputy Director for Design Engineering and Research, and Mr. J. J. Grady, Bridge Architect, Department of Highways and Traffic, presented and discussed plans for the Ninth Street Expressway under the Mall. Photographs of surrounding buildings and areas were submitted for comparison.

The Ninth Street Expressway was planned as a sister structure to the Twelfth Street Expressway. A modification in the design of the Ninth Street Expressway consisted of extending the parapet the full height, reduced to half the height of the Twelfth Street underpass, in 30 foot sections. This produced, according to Mr. Grady, a quieter design.

Feeling that the existing Twelfth Street underpass is a blot on the landscape which skillfully blocks the view to the Mall, Chairman Walton said that he thought that the standard of the Twelfth Street underpass should not be repeated. The view of the Mall should be retained and its replacement by masonry walls and heavy awkward railings of approaches should not be permitted. If the underpass was constructed 50 feet below the existing grounds the necessary walls and railings of the approach would be apparent still.

Although previous designs for approaches to an underpass have to be planned to harmonize with the surrounding buildings and areas, Mr. Warnecke thought that bridge design had reached a stage where it has little to do with surrounding buildings and suggested that the Department of Highways and Traffic hire expert professionals in architecture to assist and consult with the Department in the area of esthetics and design.

The members thought the whole project, including lighting and tile, should be restudied with a new, fresh approach to the problem.

The recommendation of hiring expert professionals did not mean establishing another advisory board, but hiring the best possible practicing consultant to consider the whole matter. An advisory board possibly would only multiply the existing problem of good design for underpasses.

Dissatisfied with the design presented, the members stated that this was not the best solution in terms of the whole problem. Specifically, the members disliked the treatment of the wall and the detail of the railing.

Mr. Bunshaft, in summarizing the discussion, stated that the Commission suggested that the Highway Department hire a good architect to study the whole problem of both tunnel materials and lighting. Materials for the walls and ceiling of the tunnel should be submitted as well as a sketch of the whole project.

The Chairman was authorized to send a report of the Commission's disapproval and a request that complete detailed information with samples of the various materials be submitted by the Department of Highways and Traffic. EXHIBIT C

c. Department of Buildings and Grounds

Gladys McGogney Elementary School, Wheeler Road and Mississippi Avenue, S.E.

Mr. G.A. Purcell, Liaison Officer, D.C. Department of Buildings and Grounds, and Mr. Murray, architect, presented preliminary sketches of site and floor plans, a rendered sketch elevation of the design, and a model of the above project. As explained by Mr. Purcell and Mr. Murray, the school was relocated to the upper level of the site, a recommendation of the Commission during the previous meeting.

This relocation required that the buildings for the general purpose room and the upper classes be on one level with the kindergarten and first grade classes in a building on a lower level. The structure for the upper class rooms would be two stories with three stories on the lower side.

The plan for the school on various levels now required terracing the land. Retaining walls as shown on the model and sketches were excessive and over-emphasized. The problem of retaining required retaining areas without decreasing the space for terraces was discussed with the members.

The members stated that the retaining walls be reduced. This reduction would be a financial saving. They suggested that the walls slope rather than step down.

The members thought that the basic concept of the design was acceptable but the details of the design appeared superficial and selected, rather than an integral part of some engineering concept. The exterior treatment did not reflect a simple structural system. The concept needed to be strengthened instead of confused by various superficial embellishments.

The basic concept of the plan was acceptable to the members who recommended that the architect develop his idea into sound, simple architecture rather than covering it with superficial details. Although Mr. Purcell and Mr. Murray preferred a listing of specific detail to be eliminated or changed, as discussed by the Commission, the members thought that the architect should restudy his original concept and include only the necessary detail essential to the architectural design.

The Chairman was authorized to send a letter stating the Commission's views. EXHIBIT D

Respectfully submitted,

C.H.Atherton
Assistant Secretary

1 October 1964

Dear Mr. Boutin:

At its meeting on September 16 the Commission of Fine Arts continued its review of the National Air and Space Museum with the architects and representatives of GSA.

The questions raised by the Commission at the June 24th meeting appear to be nearing a solution. The large piers and wall areas can be poured in place, and the cornice has been treated uniformly throughout.

There still seems to be some question regarding the siting and scale of the building. Because of the important restrictions in height on the Mall, and the number of other contributing factors, the need for depressing the first floor exhibition areas below the surrounding grade gives the building a somewhat sunken appearance. This is especially true of the west end where the difference in levels is the greatest. It was very noticeable in the perspective sketch.

The Commission recommended that the area around the base of the building be enlarged if possible and treated in a formal manner incorporating a wall or more abrupt transition from the surrounding grade to the lower terrace. This would at least provide a positive setting for the building.

As to the problem of scale, the solutions here are less apparent. If some additional details could be worked into elements like the soffit of the cornice, or the cornice itself, the size of the piers would be more readily understood. In the present design, most of the surfaces have a similar quality and for this reason the scale is difficult to perceive.

We understand that tentative sketches have been submitted to GSA and the preparation of working drawings will soon begin. The two questions raised above are going to affect the final design however, and we would like to see the architects' proposals while there is still some flexibility.

The next meeting of the Commission is scheduled for 20-21 October.

Sincerely yours,

William Walton
Chairman

Honorable Bernard Boutin
Administrator
General Services Administration
Washington, D.C.

1 October 1964

Dear Mr. Boutin:

The Commission of Fine Arts, at its meeting on 16 September considered the design for the Government Printing Office Field Plan at the Navy Yard Annex.

The Commission was glad to see that GSA was able to find a new location for this industrial facility at the Navy Yard Annex. As you will recall, the Commission strongly opposed the original site at 2nd Street, S.W. between Virginia Avenue and D Street, S.W., which would have been in full view from the west front of the Capitol.

The design of the new building appears to be simple and straightforward and was approved by the Commission as presented.

For the Commission of Fine Arts:

Sincerely yours,

William Walton
Chairman

Honorable Bernard Boutin
Administrator
General Services Administration
Washington, D.C.

1 October 1964

Dear General Duke:

At its meeting on 16 September the Commission of Fine Arts considered designs for the new underpass across the Mall at 9th Street.

We are glad to get this project at an early stage because similar projects are proposed in many other parts of the city and it is essential that a high standard of design be achieved in this project to serve as precedent for the others.

The Commission would therefore like to see the design in much greater detail. Types of lighting, color of interior wall surfaces, railings and portal construction, etc., are all important elements and should be carefully studied. In addition to these details we would also like to see studies that would describe how important views will be altered by the approach ramps and retaining walls, especially around portal entrances adjoining the Mall and other park lands. Actual photographs showing overlays of proposed work would be particularly helpful in this respect.

This may seem like more material than the Commission has required in the past. However, the success of a design of this sort depends a great deal on the overall impression of many details.

Our next meeting is scheduled for 20 - 21 October. We will be glad to consider any new material that you may have ready at that time.

For the Commission of Fine Arts:

Sincerely yours,

William Walton
Chairman

Brigadier General C.M. Duke
Engineer Commissioner for the
District of Columbia
District Building
Washington, D.C. 20004

EXHIBIT C

1 October 1964

Dear General Duke:

At its meeting on 15 September the Commission of Fine Arts considered further design studies of the new elementary school at Wheeler Road and Mississippi Avenue, S.E.

The Commission felt that the general character was acceptable but that a number of the design features appeared to grow more out of fancy than practical reason. This may be appropriate in some building programs, but in a school with a limited budget it is not justifiable. We have asked the architect to stress the fundamental elements of the building and omit extraneous detail.

The Commission also recommended several changes that would simplify the site work and reduce the number of retaining walls.

In presenting new studies to the Commission, it would be helpful to have large scale sketches illustrating several ideas, particularly in developing the details of the facades.

The next meeting of the Commission is scheduled for 20 - 21 October.

For the Commission of Fine Arts:

Sincerely yours,

William Walton
Chairman

Brigadier General C. M. Duke
Engineer Commissioner for the
District of Columbia
District Building
Washington, D.C. 20004

MEETING OF THE COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS
16 September 1964

AM
9:30 I. CONVENE, ROOM 7000, INTERIOR DEPARTMENT BUILDING

II. SUBMISSIONS-REVIEWS-INTERVIEWS

1. General Services Administration, Public Buildings Service

9:35 a. National Air and Space Museum - Revised Design

(Mr. J. Rowland Snyder, Director, Design Division, PBS, GSA; Mr. James Jones, Coordinator, GSA, PBS; Mr. Gyo Obata, Architect)

10:00 b. Government Printing Office Field Plant, Navy Yard Annex

(Mr. Snyder; Mr. Bernard Adamec, Region 3, GSA; Mr. George Riggs, Architect)

10:30 2. District of Columbia Government, Department of Licenses and Inspections

Watergate Development

(Mr. J. P. Green, Asst. Superintendent of Licenses and Permits; representatives of Watergate Development)

11:00 3. District of Columbia Government, Department of Highways and Traffic

Ninth Street Expressway under the Mall - Proposed Design

(Mr. G.I. Sawyer, Deputy Director for Design, Engrg., and research, Dept. of Highways and Traffic; Mr. J. J. Gray, Bridge Architect, Dept. of Highways and Traffic)

11:30 4. District of Columbia Government, Department of Buildings and Grounds

Gladys McGogney Elementary School, Wheeler Road and Mississippi Avenue - Revised Design

(Mr. G.A. Purcell, Liaison Officer, D.C. Dept. of Buildings and Grounds; representative of Johannes & Murray, architects)